

Undead 1001

Chapter 1001: Unusual Monsters! (4)

One of the main reasons why Skullius had demanded a blessing like [Graceful Monolith of the Eminent], was so that he could get rid of the immense threat that came with being enclosed in an opponent's Territory; the complete 'erasure' of energies and the halting of the faculties of magical regalia.

This was especially debilitating for anyone who wasn't an Incandescent Stager, and since Skullius, even with more knowledge than before, wasn't sure how his progression would go from THAT point, he decided to create this insurance.

If he remained as an Advancement Stager that – even as unusual as he was – then things would get dicey when he fought opponents like this.

His forethought had paid off, evidently.

The Hybrid Luman, who had been reduced to ash and dust became engulfed in a livid golden-white light that restored his body in the next instant!

That said, Skullius was still in the midst of the bonfire of green flames and their unusual properties which drained the life from their victims. This effect pursued him as his figure danced in the distorted mirages of the freakish heat, the Ode, who saw his revival, donning a look of thrilled awe.

"INCREDIBLE! YOU CAN ENDURE EVEN THIS?!" he cried in ecstasy, the gauntlet which had delivered the killing blow just now fading from him as faint sparks.

Skullius scowled.

He was only alive because the Preeminent Attegoth – the storage of all his skills – currently located outside the Territory, projected the effects of his skills onto his body, since he and it were the same. His own mana was stagnated, clutched by the effect of the Ode's Territory, but that didn't matter. He wouldn't really be needing it, as the Attegoth had its own mana source.

This Graceful Monolith's mana was what powered the skill responsible for Skullius' uncanny resilience towards the absurd Primary assault of this Territory and more; [Greatest Antiphon of Malignance].

This skill was a combination of [Progenitor of Light], [Gradius Order Halo], [I Am The World], [Order-Soul Projection] and of course, [Son of Luserus].

~~~

[Greatest Antiphon of Malignance (Super) | Lv.1]

The user is deigned a charming, rhythmic response to all that is disorderly, and all that is malice, gracefully equipped against every sort, every kind, and every caliber of evil there is. A true pillar of all that justice stands for by their own interpretation.

<Passive Effects>

- The user's soul is consistently guarded against low to mid-level soul attacks.
- The user attains a third pair of wings which both augment his physical properties fivefold.
- When in dire peril, the user's body will be transfigured into light that repels all attacks which reflect its light.
- A lesser portion of the speed of light is added to the user's own speed.
- Bare minimal resources are used to heal all wounds sustained, a majority of the cost for this replenished immediately; in extreme cases, larger volumes of energy will be sacrificed to resist the user's death, the costs associated replenished over time.

<Active>

[Sub-skill: OverLight]

...

---

[Sub-skill: Soul Spawn]

...

---

[Sub-skill: Masterpiece]

...

~~~

...

'I need to get out of here!' Skullius thought, and his figure streaked out of the bonfire, though, it had already begun to succumb to the flames quite a bit.

The Hybrid Luman was rather quick.

It didn't look like he actively travelled at all. He blinked from danger and appeared in the tall stalks of the prairie.

For a fraction of a moment, he had time to think.

'The voices from those old men are problematic. My passive defense to soul attacks is even more ineffective against them than when it was just the Ode...' Skullius analyzed. 'I have something that could allow me to do something similar against that brat, but sadly...'

Skullius looked down at his two swords.

He had made a blunder.

He had brought both his swords into the Territory, and all their effects were currently shut down.

It hadn't entirely been his fault though, as the activation of the Ode's Territory was way quicker than he could have ever imagined. He couldn't have transported the Bashful Abomination outside the Territory fast enough so that he could use its affix for [Evil Veneration], as he had done against the bald Incandescent Stager.

'These two only have value as strong basic swords right now...'

Right then, the Ode stormed right towards Skullius from the sky like a meteor!

His landing was more than a little explosive, making the prairie look as though it was suddenly assaulted by a desert sand storm!

The Ode shot from the plumes of dust and Skullius readied Demion's Dance while making several calculations in his head.

The crimson-haired young man skidded against the rough ground and hooked six of his fingers together with a demented grin.

"Overcast Inferno!" he chanted, and the many swirling clouds above, with flames stowed deep within them, set the fires loose!

Condensed red flames, given the likeness of tubular beams numbering in the tens of thousands dropped from the sky and swerved as they all shot towards Skullius' position!

This number of attacks... Would his field of disembodied sword slashes be able to eliminate them all? No way, not all of them! But, if he actively attacked instead of depending on his passive defense...

The Ode resumed his course towards Skullius as the sky turned blinding red with the incoming attack. He pulled out a strand of his hair, coiled it around his finger and watched it turn into a pretty ring.

Skullius took in all this dire information with his broad senses, and readied his swords.

But then...

"TORN!"

"TERROR!"

"TWIST!"

"TURN!"

His body was viciously twisted in different directions simultaneously, and for a moment, Skullius looked like a mangled towel!

A sphere of light devoured him, but not before the flurry of attacks from above bombarded him, turning a portion of the prairie into a mound of bloated flames that continued to expand and rise with such great heat that, had it all been outside, a fourth of Opungale would have been pulverized!

But the Ode didn't think that was enough, thus he dived into the flames, which had no effect on him and pointed his ring at the struggling figure surrounded by indescribable, butchering, incinerating chaos.

The Hybrid Luman was on fire, his body smoking heavily, but the damage that reached him was not as furious.

In fact...

The Ode's face changed when he saw a single, blank eye stare at him from the masses of flames that buried Skullius' body.

Then he heard it.

"Absolute Sever!"

...

Right as the Hybrid Luman called, the Bashful Abomination cut across the flames that obscured his figure with the same ease one would see experience when wiping away dust from a glossy surface with a finger.

However, it wasn't only the flames that were suddenly wiped laterally.

The Ode was also split, a wide, empty gap coming to separate his head from his legs.

But that also wasn't all.

The grasses in the prairie were sliced through, then the feet of the old folks by the campfire, then the far wall of the Territory which shattered like glass with a terrifying tremble to reveal a portion of Opungale beyond it!

Skullius narrowed his eyes while the Ode's bulged, blood exploding from his mouth.

But the Hybrid Luman wasn't done.

This was only to give himself an opening.

He needed more.

More of everything.

And this was the perfect chance to utilize it all, despite the immense costs, which he had dreaded.

Thus, the Hybrid Luman began with a sub-skill of [Greatest Antiphon of Malignance].

"[OverLight]!" he called, and once again, his appearance changed, starting with the bangles of light around his wrists, legs and neck.

Chapter 1002: Flurry!

Ashema would have been the one to recognize the blinding light immediately and what it meant. Though what it represented had changed significantly since the Carven had saw it, the danger it symbolized had not diminished one bit, even if it manifested within the confines of a Territory.

The eyes on the disembodied head of the Ode were immediately blinded by the flash of light from the sub-skill, [OverLight].

The brilliance could have masked all the characteristics of the Territory if not for the mysteriously somber atmosphere that had already existed within the prairie, even when the bulging flames from the previous attack had yet to fade.

Even the remnants of this fiery attack were drowned, becoming part of the Hybrid Luman's magnificence.

Skullius barely had a visible outline to denote where he was started and where he ended.

The only things that marked his position, were the bangles he wore.

They had changed, becoming broader and attaining a gem-like look, as though an assortment of precious, not-too-colorful minerals made them, a soft, moonlight-reminiscent glow oozing from them.

The bangles, rings rather, gathered around both his arms, stacking from his wrist to his elbow; ten in all.

They had attained the properties of the Heart of Revelation, which had vanished just when Skullius was sucked into the Territory. However, they were better in combat.

The Ode's blinded eyes continued to stare at the Luminant's light before he died, his body turning to ash.

Less than a second later though, the Ode emerged from the green fire between the giant men, a deep scowl on his face.

Fortunately, the towering beings around him, while having had their legs cut, did not seem to be harmed.

Their flesh simply bubbled and created new sets of legs, and the old folks continued tending to their weapons.

The Ode looked at the distant storm of brightness that wafted from Skullius, then at the huge section of his Territory that had been carved up by Skullius' latest attack.

'To think he can do it so easily... I suppose it's the same concept he applied earlier...' the Ode thought, recalling how Skullius had shredded space at the beginning of their fight. 'Or maybe he can't do it as casually as he made me believe. I just need to wait for my Secondary assault to charge, and I can end this...'

Right as he thought this, his senses crazily taking in every detail around him, the Ode... was beheaded.

His headless body soon collapsed to the ground, and another exploded out of the green flames behind it.

Yet... it too was suddenly split in half, then into five portions that turned to ash... right after another crimson-haired man bolted from the flames only to die to something unseen!

The seventh incarnation of the Ode chose not to leave the safety of the green flame entirely, anticipating that death would claim it immediately, but this tact proved ineffective as well.

The harrowing green flame was suddenly dyed golden-white as a jarringly bright figure invaded its enclosure!

The Ode gritted his teeth, but he barely had a chance to think when a fist exploded into his chest, sinking deep within it.

Right after, a gem-like ring around the arm that had assaulted him rocketed into the Ode, and when it hit his skin, it erased it from sight, leaving behind a grotesque collection of organs and bones that were immediately diced mercilessly by a shower of disembodied sword slashes!

The moment the next revival of the crimson-haired young man appeared, it received the same treatment, and so did the next, and the next and the next...

[OverLight] was a superior, revamped version of [Son of Luserus].

It maximized Skullius' use of [Just Light] while giving him the properties of light that [Son of Luserus] had.

In this form, the Hybrid Luman could repel attacks that reflected his light (as before); he was as intangible as light until he desired to strike an enemy – which happened passively; and he could move at speeds comparable to 70% the speed of light... on top of the speed he already had.

Against such a thing, the Ode couldn't keep up, even with the boost from his Territory.

What made things worse for him, was the fact that the abilities of the [Infinite Sword God] were simply stacked on top of all this; the passive defense and the active offense.

The Ode's only saving grace was...

"HALT!"

"HUMBLED!"

"HEFT!"

"HEED HIM!"

Right after Skullius killed the twenty fourth revived Ode of the First Horn, he was suddenly forced to stoop moving and his vague outline staggered as an immense weight crushed him!

The voices of the old folk again!

In that moment, the twenty fifth Ode emerged with a face scarred with dark contours born out of hideous rage. He was fuming, and with the fourth command just now having made Skullius even more vulnerable to him, he barked at the top of his lungs:

"LOSE ALL THAT FUCKING LIGHT!"

And the Hybrid Luman did.

He involuntarily – or perhaps the opposite – deactivated his light skills, leaving him as the man with glowing auburn hair, gleaming skin and the robe with three pairs of wings imprinted on it!

The Ode looked mad.

His fury was yet to be loosened.

Despite knowing that it was unreasonable, he coated his arm with a vicious amount of Nitros and threw a straight punch with all his might right into Skullius' face!

Skullius' passive defense shredded the Ode's arm, but not before the sheer force of it minced the Hybrid Luman's skin and a portion of his skull!

By then, the Ode was already throwing another unreasonable flurry of punches... but the Hybrid Luman healed instantly, and his defense against attacks aimed at the soul finally managed to allow him to resist the commands from the voices!

Skullius' face turned fierce.

His swords had been hidden within his robe of darkness, which still existed even when he was a well of light; only overshadowed.

His aim since using [OverLight] had been to deplete the Ode's energy reserves by making him spam his revival over and over, which likely used a lot of Nitros – from mana.

And he kept it up for now as he prepared the next move.

Skullius threw his own punch, a jab that bashed the Ode's abs in!

In exchange, he received a fist force that tore off his jaw and his throat, and returned one that caused the Ode's chest pad to explode, showing off his lung!

The exchange continued. The Ode landed way more hits than Skullius did, but the Hybrid Luman healed right after. And while he landed fewer punches, the Ode's injuries didn't heal. Damaged piled on until the crimson-haired young man was just about as firm as a ripped tomato.

Then, both men grinned, the Ode with one of vicious, furious glee, and Skullius with the sly, triumphant kind.

At nearly the same time, both men cried out the names of devastating moves.

"TRIUMPH OF THE ARSENAL!"

"ABSOLUTE SEVER!"

As it just so happened, one of the two had been faster than the other.

The Secondary assault of the Territory... as dreadful as it would have been, was just a micro moment too slow.

The Hybrid Luman suddenly regained his brilliance from moments ago which disrupted the Ode's vision, and the Bashful Abomination appeared in his hand at the same time.

What then followed, were the swift, delicate and intricate slashes from an Infinite Sword God executed with a speed close to that of light!

Only when the Territory shattered into hundreds of thousands of solid white shards did the Ode realize what had happened, and his fury died, leaving room only for shock.

Had his Territory been...?

"I guess only one of us could back up their ego, huh?" Skullius said as Demion's Dance appeared in his hand, its effects now functional.

Before the Ode could reply, [Courting Death] was activated and an overwhelming field of Mortal Ruin he couldn't escape, especially with all his mana lost from projecting his Territory, appeared, rending his body.

Chapter 1003: Mild Intervention

Queen Embrell had made sure to create a fitting distance between herself and the fight that had been about to unfold. The collateral damage had turned out to not be as devastating towards her land as she had anticipated. At least for now.

She had watched from afar, slowly realizing how, with both combatants' showings, she might have died instantly if she were to fight against either of them.

This wasn't strictly because they were definitely stronger than her, a Transcendent Stager, but it seemed that both of these men had Hidden Classes and she knew nothing about them. What would likely have caused her defeat was responding horribly to either of their first moves. That was usually what it all boiled down where fights of this caliber were concerned; the first move and the first response.

When Embrell had seen the erection of the Territory, her heart had skipped a beat.

She realized in that instant, that she had been, and she had to be rooting for Skullius the entire time, and him getting dragged into a Territory didn't bode well. This was especially true for someone like him, who wasn't an Incandescent Stager.

What dissolved this preconceived notion that she applied on the challenger for her people – for her nation – however, was the giant, glowing construct in the distance.

The Preeminent Attegoth.

How was it that this thing, which she knew from Darwel was related to that man, was still active when he was in a Territory?

It was curious. Curious indeed.

A spark of hope glinted in the Queen's heart.

As it turned out, she wasn't the only one who viewed the great glowing structure as a symbol that spoke of victory for the Sif and everyone allied with them.

Several figures approaching the vicinity of the battlefield also viewed it as such, and to them, it was a positive.

Another aged individual close to where the battle was proceeding also saw the great structure as a symbol of victory, but not for her side. Her old eyes narrowed maliciously.

What the result of the Territorial expulsion turned out to be fueled the negativity that blazed from them.

[Courting Death] was as unforgiving as ever, especially with the 500% passive boost given by [Infinite Sword God]. As soon as its dark red complex net appeared, it eviscerated anything that was touched by it, dismantling the air and the mana flooding it.

The Ode was not an exception to this horrific effect, and he didn't have a chance to defend or to plant another Thriving Green flame to revive himself. His body was butchered in an instant, leaving behind only a cloud of thick red that swam slowly in the temporary vacuum.

....

Hmmm...

'Could that be the end of it?' Skullius frowned, his brilliance stark and promising.

He would have loved to believe that the Ode was done for, but...

...!

"This is my Creed! Restore my flesh to perfection!"

Again, he heard a powerful voice that didn't come from any flesh.

Of course!

The Ode could speak with his soul, and Skullius' [Courting Death], unlike the determined slash Skullius had used to kill the Ode the first time, and the ones he used in the Ode's Territory – through the active use of [Infinite Sword God] – couldn't destroy his soul.

'I miscalculated!' Skullius thought as he set to rectify his mistake.

His speed would have allowed him to kill the Ode in an instant... and perhaps it did.

By the time the Creed the Ode used had begun to manifest the internal structure of his body, Skullius' Bashful Abomination – while muttering words of glee against Skullius' command for it to not speak during battle – was already slicing him in half.

The world was drained in as Skullius slashed, and he could see, in drastically slowed time, the taut tension on the Ode's barely formed face.

The brat was done for!

As young as he was, he was certainly powerful, but Skullius didn't hesitate to snuff that potential away, regardless of the consequences.

He could handle them. He had been counting on them.

However...

BOOOOM! CRAAASH!

Skullius' eyes turned oddly round.

A prominent ignition had made itself known from a familiar direction, and its source wasn't anything to sneeze at. No, not at all!

Skullius didn't need extraneous senses from nature to tell.

The Attegoth had sustained a massive amount of damage!

A portion of its top canopy of skulls had been pulverized by a shocking, cold eruption that seemed more like the collapse of space than the explosion of an element!

'Who the hell...!' Skullius fumed.

Who indeed!

He only hesitated for a tenth of a moment with his decisive attack on the Ode, but that was enough.

The Ode shrieked desperately:

"STOP!"

And it was so.

Skullius was forced to stop and watch as the Ode's body fully formed along with his vibrant mana core.

Damn Creeds!

The Ode didn't bother to mock or snigger. His first order of business was to cast three Thriving Green flames in different locations and dash away from Skullius' brilliance, creating a massive distance between them.

He then glanced at the Preeminent Attegoth, portions of it, glass-like as sparkling flakes of snow floating from the sky, dropping to the ground.

The one to deal the blow to the Attegoth was all but known, and this told the crimson-haired young man much.

"So that's it! That's how you're so stupidly powerful, even in my Territory!" the Ode cried with a sick look on his face. "But... what a foolish weakness!"

Skullius scowled like a demon.

Right then, he was freed from the command on his soul and once again the Ode was killed before he knew it.

As he appeared from one of his flames, Skullius was closing in; he was much slower because he almost had to guess in which of the three possible respawn points the Ode would emerge.

That subtle gap allowed the young man a chance to speak.

"Majestic Territory Expulsion, Old Folks' Campfire!"

....!!!

For a second time, Skullius was caught in the Territory. Its activation was just as fast as the last time it was used.

However, Skullius was prepared this time.

He was prepared for the voices!

He was prepared for the Ode!

"Bring it on!"

He shot straight towards the green fire, where the Ode had appeared last time.

Unfortunately, that turned out to be a useless move.

As it so happened, the four giants by the fire were no longer sitting down, tending to their weapons. They were standing, their weapons in hand.

...!!!

A voice called out from the sky, where the Ode was, buried behind the swirling clouds, a mad grin on his vein-lathered face.

"TRIUMPH OF THE ARSENAL!"

...And the Secondary assault function began.

Chapter 1004: STOP!

The fact that Old Folks' Campfire wasn't a normal Territory hadn't been lost to Skullius since the first time he had to endure all the attacks it held. The moment he saw that it had living beings within it, created out of the Ode's power, he had turned wary.

Even with his prior knowledge, before being influenced by the WILLS, Skullius could already somewhat differentiate the Tiers of Territories, which were distinguished by how many living creatures were within it.

This difference he had noticed early on was with the Great Mane Mountain Ape Azila's Territory, which had the flying Cluster Flies, and the Territory of the Grinning Jester Fox, which didn't have any living beings at all.

His more recent intel pointed towards how Rayn's Territory had held within it an entire city of humans praising a moon.

What then was the benefit of all this? Well, normal Territories had the potential for creating Primary and Secondary attack and defense functions, while the strongest ones could create a Tertiary.

Of course, the difference between each – Primary, Secondary and Tertiary – was mostly a matter of power and effectiveness, but it also depended on the individual's preference.

Against this notion, Skullius grew tense. It was also astonishing to him that the Ode was able to revive his Territory in the state it was prior to its deactivation. That had to be why the Secondary assault mechanisms was ready, despite the Territory just being erected!

"TRIUMPH OF THE ARSENAL!

SHIIIIIIING!

The Hybrid Luman heard the scream of steel against the wind drop onto him, and instinctively, he dodged despite being well equipped against attacks from material weapons.

His figure appeared two hundred meters away just when a cutlass slammed where he had been standing before.

One of the four bearded giants had just moved.

'So, this is his Secondary assault? These four things start to attack as well? Hmmm, doesn't seem too threatening so far. Though, I should probably keep my guard,' Skullius thought.

The four giants took steps away from their rocky seats and split up as they moved among the stalks of grass in the prairie.

Each held a different weapon. Aside from the one that had just attacked, the others had an axe, a chakram and a spear. The weapons looked crude and ordinary, but no one in their right minds would dare underestimate the Secondary mechanisms of a Territory.

Skullius' eyes shot towards the sky where the Ode was hidden among the clouds, looking gleeful and victorious. He was starting to look like the brat he was. Past his earlier confidence that actually made him feel like the son of a king, he was just an arrogant young blood.

'I really should end this quickly. The Attegoth is in danger. That damn hag—' Skullius thought, but then something quick interrupted him.

It whizzed through the air while releasing a grinding noise like that from a chainsaw!

It was the chakram!

No sooner had Skullius heard its approach, had it actually arrived in front of him.

He could react to it, quite easily, in fact. Demion's Dance had bit into the ring-like weapon's bladed edges when...

"STOP!"

"STOP!"

"STOP!"

"STOP!"

"STOP!"

...!!!

Skullius heard five voices that demanded that he desist from moving...and he did!

'DAMN IT!'

The Ode had added himself to the roster this time!

The voices, as they gave the same command this time, seemed to have their effect stacked, which was horrible for Skullius!

What was worse...

VWUUUUUP!

The chakram was repelled by the vibrant light of [OverLight] as expected, since Skullius could no longer follow through with his attack.

However...

BOOOOOM!

Skullius suddenly found that he had been impaled by something!

His body of light, had been harmed!

With great shock, he sensed down at his chest and found the oversized shaft of a spear cleanly having borne through him.

'What?!' the Hybrid Luman groaned angrily.

What was going on?

What happened to his defenses?

What happened to his intangibility?

"HAHAHAHA! It works!" the Ode screamed from above.

Skullius still couldn't move. It was going to take longer for him to get his freedom, and that was a massive advantage for the crimson-haired young man.

In fact...

One of the other giants bolted to reach Skullius in one, phenomenally quick step, hunched and swung its giant axe in a swift, disastrous lateral swipe!

Oddly, when the axe and the hand holding it grew too close, the brilliant light from Skullius forced it back in a rather effective jerk, which made Skullius keenly narrow his eyes.

'Then how...' he had begun to ask when his light body was suddenly shredded at any angle by a huge chakram, whose arrival came unannounced!

What in the world...?!

Fortunately, Skullius' healing kicked in, restoring his body, but he still couldn't move.

'What in the world is happening? Is it some kind of forced trade-off? When one weapons fails to reach me, the next does, regardless of all my defenses? That's ridiculous!' the Hybrid Luman thought before he felt the great storm cooked up by another giant who descended on him with the crude cutlass.

The attack was nullified by his defenses, but the axe that came next tore off his lower body, even as his outline was hidden by the expansive light!

Again, Skullius healed, but he still couldn't move.

He went through three more sessions of brutal, ridiculous cleavings and impalements, feeling the Attegoth's mana drain away rapidly.

This was an inconceivably effective Secondary assault mechanism. It certainly fit the name Triumph of the Arsenal. For something like this to be possible, a lot of effort and Creeds must have been sacrificed, after all, the Ode's attacks were not really unstoppable. They only became unstoppable after one of them had been stopped.

'This can't go on!'

Being restricted was definitely the worst part for Skullius.

The fact that the Primary assault of this Territory still applied was outrageous, and it seemed to be amplified to some degree. If the Ode could have used the quintuple STOP command before, he would have done it.

Speaking of the bugger...

The crimson-haired young man shot down from the clouds and raced towards Skullius.

"It's your turn to become helpless, huh?! Eventually, you're going to run out of mana, and even before then, that thing of yours outside will probably collapse first!" he yelled jovially before manifesting an erratic white flame from his right hand which he cast into the air.

It was the last of the Ode's flames; the Famished White Flame.

The flame snaked in four ways, and was sucked into the four weapons of the giants which turned then illusory and pale.

...!!!

Skullius immediately knew that this was going to be bad news. Whatever that flame induced was either going to cause him to lose even more mana as a result of the damage that followed, or something worse.

To make matters even more perilous, he felt the Attegoth quiver terribly.

If the Attegoth fell while he was still in this territory. He would be done for.

'Come on. I just need to get out of this bind and I can end this. I will end this...!' Skullius thought determinedly as a white, see-through chakram clashed against the air to reach him!

Right then...

He felt the spell of compulsion lift just before he could taste what the Famished flame could do, and his impossible speed allowed him to get out of the way.

He flashed a long distance away, realizing once again how large this Territory was.

The Ode cackled from the distance, and when he and the giants opened their mouths to speak, Skullius knew they were ready to put him under immobility again.

However...

Unbeknownst to them, he had truly been ready for the compulsion. Rather, he had learned to be, as he discovered every ridiculous trait of his [Infinite Sword God] skill which apparently qualified to be its own Hidden Class.

While wielding both his swords, Skullius let out a burst of frustration from his gleaming lips... before attempting to cut something that shouldn't have been possible to cut...

Chapter 1005: The Defenders!

Right before the Ode's Territory was shattered, Ashema had been having quite the jolly time watching the crimson-haired brat lose. It was thrilling to know that even among 'his kind', Skullius was just as overbearing in power as he appeared during their fight.

In fact, the circumstances of the Ode looked even worse, especially when factoring that Skullius had just powered himself up with the odd great tree; the one Ashema was currently relaxing on.

The Carven had been sitting down leisurely while drinking the blood from his gourd. If there was a snack to go with the drink and entertainment, he might have been happier, but it was what it was.

Aside from giggling and gaping in awe, Ashema had also been studying in great detail just how the system of the humans and the 'long-ears' worked. It seemed complex and convoluted, as though someone had been intent on making it too complicated for the sake of it.

How unrefined.

At the very least, Ashema felt that he wouldn't have nothing to tell the Herald when he inevitably headed back to her and reported what happened here.

'Well, that ought to be fun...' he thought.

Well, what turned to not be fun, was the fact that something was hurtling towards the great tree he was sitting on, intent on blowing off the canopy of skulls... and probably more.

It looked like a spherical distortion, or perhaps a visible mass of air the size of a fist, rushing Ashema's way with frightening power that even the Carven dared not to take lightly.

The fact that Ashema could appraise such a thing was already an indication as to how devastating it was!

The Carven contemplated escaping and leaving the Attegoth to its doom, but in the next instant...

Blood poured in unreal volumes from his gourd, and then an equally vexing amount of darkness melded into, flooding around where the attack was likely to hit.

The distortion had been rather quick, and Ashema had been sure he didn't have enough time to solidify the defense he was creating, but the great tree under his feet seemed to be capable of defending itself... or attempting to, at least.

The huge 700,000 orbs of darkness that had been whirling around it gathered where the attack was going to hit... but the result wasn't exactly spectacular.

The nature of the attack turned out to be more spatial than anything else. Instead of an explosion or a raw, physically impact, the distortion pulled in all the orbs as it spun and shockingly became bigger, as though feeding on them!

Ashema used that miniscule morsel of time when the distortion cancelled out the Attegoth's defense to try and wrap it up all up in the blanket of blood and darkness he made, and then, he swiftly summoned a Carven bird to open up a portal to suck in all the calamitous mess before it grew worse.

It worked... but not before the distortion, which had been successfully covered up by the mix of blood and darkness for three seconds, exerted a devastating crushing force on everything near it.

A third of the Attegoth's canopy was shattered like glass, and Ashema who had been standing on it wasn't left unscathed.

Thankfully, that devastating power had only been the beginnings of what that distortion could have done had it not been transported elsewhere in the next micro-second.

Ashema, with half his body crushed to pulpy bits sighed and glared at the culprit behind the attack; the old woman he and Skullius had seen by the shore.

"Just great..." he said in a sarcastic tone. "Isn't this cheating?"

Umbett gave him a suspicious look, and then another spherical distortion appeared above her, this one... about a fourth of the size of the Attegoth.

"Dear Boron..." Ashema said with a tone of defeat.

The fact that the grant attack was even faster than the last, somehow blinking from its source and emerging right where the great Graceful Monolith was with its unhealthily, oppressive power only made the Carven shake his head.

He had tried.

Surely, he couldn't be judged for fleeing, right? Rather, incarnating elsewhere after the approaching certain death?

BOOOOOM! VRRRRRRRRR!

A sound the Carven hadn't expected to hear ground against his ears.

The distortion... had been blocked!

"Who's stupid enough to..." Ashema began as he looked before the great tree.

A rather attractive lady with navy blue hair had appeared in the way of the distortion!

A giant brass kite shield was in front of her, lilac flames spitting from its edges, and it had stopped the great distortion in its tracks... only to start getting crumpled and sucked in the next instant.

The woman didn't seem too concerned though, despite staring death right in the face.

Right when the shield she had conjured was completely destroyed, twelve thin plates that looked to be made of glass, flew in front of her from below in rapid succession.

A micro moment later, they were suddenly replaced by twelve enormous Sif houses, barky, rootlike, and with great widths.

Another lady with pink hair, stationed on the ground was responsible for this, but the look on her face reflected her acknowledgment of the fact that this wasn't a solution to the problem at hand.

Of course, even the dozen constructs – massive as they were – were swallowed by the frightening distortion in a matter of seconds, but that turned out to have been the goal.

Vali had needed those few seconds to materialize from her great, lilac flame – her conduit – another great shield, thicker and firmer than last.

Of course, there was not a chance in heck that it would last any longer than the twelve houses just now, but...

"Eternal Shield of Furious Shielding against Threatening Threats and Impossible Odd Odds!"

A man donning funny, colorful clothing seemed to emerged out of thin air and call loudly as he placed his on the shield.

It was Braxten Shannazah, and his uncanny Technique which made any material object he touched stronger the more ridiculous the name he gave it!

It worked as he said.

The distortion ground against the great shield, but didn't manage to do anything to it!

A clash of impossible forces began, persisting on as large sparks flew!

Right as Braxten had appeared, however, a short woman had appeared too. She kicked off the Attegoth and hurtled with extreme speed towards the interior of the giant, seemingly invincible shield. The force she generated pushed the shield against the distortion a fair bit and their clash inched further away from the great, golden tree!

Ashema was stunned.

To think all these people actually pitched in to save that bastard's tree...

"He actually has friends?" the Carven asked himself, a tinge of what felt like hope igniting in him.

The individuals guarding against the distortion – Vali, Maxim, Shannazah and Kudobtu – felt the same too.

...

Unfortunately, Umbett licked her crusty lips.

The effort to stop her attack had surprised her. However, it annoyed her even more.

Thus... she warped to the Attegoth, appearing where its trunk emerged from the lake.

She gave a suffocating glare to the defenders, all of whom turned to various tones of pale.

"I just want this thing destroyed. I don't care much for your lives, but if you are so insistent, I may take them along with this abomination."

The old hag's voice brought a halt to hope and cheer.

...And of course, what followed was...

Chapter 1006: What Should Not Be Cut

At the same time...

Skullius was free from the halting command, at last. Its stacked effect had worked against the counteracting effect of his [Greatest Antiphon of Malignance] skill, making it take longer to restore his mobility.

The Hybrid Luman hadn't suffered too much as a result, only losing a significant amount of mana from the barrage of unreal attacks that came after. He knew this expense was costing the Attegoth its ability to protect itself.

However, now was not the time to be worrying about that. The best thing he could do, was to end the battle in here quickly.

The Ode doubted he could.

It was visible on his face.

He had an evil smile that carried forth the rage he still felt from having being beaten down so terribly before.

Skullius knew that the brat knew, if it weren't for that granny interrupting him earlier, he would have been done for, and that card was still in play for the Ode.

The young man manifested another weapon from his twenty-five-weapon set; a product of his Emporium Red flame. It was a glaive with a blade that was constantly fuming with red flames!

The brat looked particularly happy to wield it. Almost as happy as he was to give the command – along with the old folk – for Skullius to stop moving again.

Yet... Skullius was ready.

With both the suppressed Bashful Abomination and Demion's Dance in his lightly outlined glowing hands, he slashed... continuously.

Skullius didn't know what it was about the [Infinite Sword God] skill.

It was like how standing on a cliff, for some people, encouraged them to jump down to their deaths.

That same feeling of just engaging with great temptation without caring for the consequences, an unreasonable sensation to mess around and find out, was what he felt every time he actively used this skill in his slashes.

Throughout the entire battle, Skullius had been learning all it had to offer, and he finally reaching the pinnacle of what the Infinite Sword God was capable of.

Unseen by all, Skullius' hands blurred as he slashed in the direction of the giants and the Ode.

To anyone who might have been able to see what he was doing in his cage of radiance, they would have thought he was simply slicing some floating vegetables.

However, in reality...

"STO—" the Ode began when... his lips chipped continuously as though pressed through a shredder, his teeth sliced into sharp, white shards, his tongue filleted finely like a fish, and his jaw mutilated into neat, even bloody columns!

The cruel slashes did not stop until they butchered everything to where the Ode's tongue ended, leaving him looking quite unsightly.

Shockingly, the four giants had received the same treatment, and in the same capacity, despite their size.

Suddenly, blood had littered the pretty prairie, and an odd silence overtook the Territory.

...

Skullius, vague as he was, remained in his masterful stance with the two different swords, seemingly lost in the sensation he had felt just now.

Yes.

Yes, it was pretty exhilarating.

He couldn't have known, even with the WILLS of Fulgardt that this was how it felt.

"So, this is how it feels like to cut a voice?" he said.

...

The Infinite Sword God's voice sounded rather loud to those who had just had their own voice minced.

His words were especially terrifying for the Ode who died immediately after hearing them, only to emerge from the large Thriving Green flame with a shaken, pale look on his face.

'No... No, that can't be!' he thought, his eyes turning bloodshot.

He ground his teeth in fury.

There was no way!

How could it be?!

Cutting a voice?! Nonsense!

Who was this man fooling? He had just sliced off their mouths before they could speak!

The Ode's giants healed as they had done before, and at his command, they opened their mouths to speak again.

They all yelled "STOP" at the exact time.

The Hybrid Luman wore a small smile.

His swords moved, rending something more than just the air.

He felt exactly what it was, soft but resilient, tear apart when Demion's Dance and the Bashful Abomination assaulted it.

It had been like a large cloth, soaring towards him with surety.

Sound travelled, after all.

Skullius knew it. Voices travelled in sound's coattails.

To the Hybrid Luman, as soon as he had thought about something like cutting a voice, such a thing without a physical form, had become a target for his blade.

To his enemies, once they spoke, nothing happened, and Skullius made it a point to show them this by moving slowly forward right after the four commands had been sent!

The Ode shook.

"No! That's not a thing! No one can do that!" he screamed.

He couldn't accept it.

To accept that his power was rendered useless... that his unique trait, so rare in Maqi that he had been the second human to have it since the Grand Wars, was useless...

No way!

Of course, the young man couldn't have known, what the [Infinite Sword God] truly was.

~~~

[Infinite Sword God (Super) | Lv.1]

You are one who cuts ALL things as long as you can envision it, whether with a blade or with a mere fingernail.

<Passive Effect>

- Enhances the efficiency of all swords wielded by 500%
- A field of imperceptible slashes constantly protect the user and may automatically improve their own potency if need be through increasing mana output
- The user can freely understand the effects and intent of any sword in their proximity
- The user will be dragged into a flow state whenever they feel enlightened, with the extent of the effect judged by their own understanding of what is possible or otherwise

...

<Active>

[Sword Style I: Absolute Severance Divine Sword Arts]

Every three minutes, the user is allowed a ten-second period where natural concepts and principles become submissive to their sword's sadistic desires, allowing them to easily cut apart that which can only be mended by Divine and Divine-conceived powers.

-Sub-skill: Absolute Sever-

...

...

---



[Sword Style II: Slow Ghost Divine Sword Art]

...

[Sword Style III: Unmotivated Bender Divine Sword Art]

...

[Sword Style IV: Beyond-Scale Critical Divine Sword Art]

...

...

~~~

The skill Skullius was currently using had varying styles that he could tap into, all with different purpose but similar in the level of power and efficiency.

Skullius had never hoped to learn them all during this battle. He hadn't had the time to. However, this particular application he had learned, or rather convinced himself was possible, was certainly a frightening boon.

The Ode roared, and his giant, living constructs rushed towards Skullius instead of trying to immobilise him with words.

The Secondary assault of the Territory, which he had worked so hard to craft after amassing a lot of knowledge and using a considerable number of Creeds, was still active after all, and the weapons of his minions were bolstered significantly.

All the Ode needed to do was to make sure Skullius got hit. Even if that failed, he could stall until his Tertiary assault mechanism was ready, that would secure his victory.

'I WON'T LOSE!'

The crimson-haired young man rushed towards Skullius as well.

The Hybrid Luman watched the enemy's approach.

"It ends here," he said confidently.

...

Three disturbing things followed his declaration.

The Hybrid Luman slashed with [Absolute Sever] in all directions with his tremendous speed.

Almost at the same time, his [OverLight] vanished, leaving him looking as he had been before acquiring [Greatest Antiphon of Malignance].

Right after, he then felt his enlightenment in the sword, fade.

Both the Ode and Skullius were shaken.

The Territory shattered, but instead of feeling victorious, Skullius' brows furrowed.

This time, he employed nature to sense it clearly from a different perspective.

The Preeminent Attegoth... was soon to be lost.

Chapter 1007: Did You Say Trump Card?

Skullius hadn't quite been able to keep sharing the expansive vision of the Attegoth while fighting in a battle of this caliber.

However, what he saw now, as the shards of Old Folks' Campfire flew in all directions, summarized what had just happened.

The sight he saw featured several people flying off in different directions, away from what remained of his glorious Graceful Monolith; a torn half of it, detached from its brilliant, visually engaging canopy.

Skullius saw Vali and Maxim, gravely injured in one direction, Shannazah and Kudobtu seemingly fleeing in another, and Ashema soaring up with half a functional body.

Their opponent, was of course, the calm old woman standing on the surface of the lake the Attegoth was growing from, looking at its doomed glow with an expressionless, frighteningly wrinkled face.

Frightening indeed.

It seemed the shattering of the Territory had drawn the attention of Skullius' defenders.

Vali and Maxim had exasperated looks, the former donning one that had hints of a smile while the latter looked a little furious.

It looked like they had tried their darndest and seeing their effort not pay off made them feel bitter.

Shannazah and Kudobtu looked a little more blasé. This really appeared to be a side mission for them, even though they had wanted to help as much as they could. Skullius assumed Vali and Maxim had told them about how the glowing tree was some kind of ultimate move of his that should be defended, reining them in.

As the two representatives of the Pelian Houses looked the Hybrid Luman's way, they seemed to offer their apologies.

'Well, it was all my fault in the end. I was not fast enough...' Skullius thought. The large, purple mana core in the Attegoth was still present, but it wasn't as vibrant. There were only a few tens of thousands of units of mana left.

Considering the cost of his Super skills, that was quite little.

The Attegoth might have been able to use [Greatest Mana Manipulation] to draw more mana, compress it and replenish the purple quality reserves, but that was too huge of an undertaking for it with all the skills Skullius had been using in this battle.

'A shame...' Skullius thought.

The only reason the Attegoth even had its bottom half still standing, was because another person was standing against Umbett.

It was Queen Embrell.

She looked a little worn, but she was far from looking beaten up.

Skullius wouldn't have believed that the five he saw flying off had been able to stave off Umbett since he was dragged into the second Territory expulsion. The fact that the Sif Queen had entered the fray made it all make sense.

She too seemed to give him a concerned look from the vast distance, and then sigh.

She too must have felt that her efforts were close to meaningless, after all, the Graceful Monolith was doomed.

While the purpose of the Attegoth was still vague for others, they understood a little of what it could do; 'it must strengthen that man's unusual powers greatly' was the common assumption.

And it was true. The Attegoth housed Skullius' skills, and if parts of it where certain skills were imbued were destroyed... he would lose access to said skills – as it was with how he had lost access to both his most powerful skills just now.

Contrary to the somberness that sat on everyone who was not Maqian though....

"HAHAHAHA! I told you! That thing sticks out like a sore thumb! You lost the moment we discovered it was your trump card!" the Ode barked jubilantly... after creating a large distance between himself and Skullius.

He must have felt incredibly confidence because the Thriving Green flames he had set up earlier were still burning brightly, meaning that even as he was, mana-less and fiendishly tired mentally, he could still revive after death.

But even beyond that fact, which was still something Skullius could potentially take care of, even without his full powers...

"This is my Creed! Restore my mana!" the Ode cried once again.

Again, the crimson-haired young man had used his Creeds to replenish what he had lost, and no one looked happier than him. He wore a mad look on his face as he stared at Skullius fearlessly.

"That was your way around not perishing instantly within a Territory, right?! Right? It's dead now, and this time, I strip you bare and kill you hundreds of times!"

It was clear what the Ode was about to do.

Once again, he was about to use his Territory.

With how loud the Ode yelled out, everyone within the region heard what he said, and no small amount of concern filled Maxim, Vali and even Queen Embrell.

This was a loss.

It didn't matter if the Ode and Umbett weren't playing fair. Or maybe they were.

The Attegoth could be said to be an outsider, so perhaps it was right for Umbett to destroy it.

The battle rite, Kuthmuk, only acted to set area limits for the battle, to decide the terms of the battle and what the winner would get, after all. Nothing else.

Skullius and the Ode had set firm conditions already... and it looked like the latter had won.

...

"You sure have a lot of Creeds to spare. And did you just say trump card?" Skullius asked leisurely.

His calmness took the Ode aback.

What?

"Ah, I see. You thought my Graceful Monolith was a trump card. I guess it definitely looks the part," Skullius said before stowing away Demion's Dance in his Temporary storage, and leaving only the Bashful Abomination in his grip.

The Ode was confused. This gesture by Skullius both worsened and lessened his anxiety about the man's freakish sword attacks.

"Hah! Say it till you believe it!" the Ode bellowed, and he set to expel his Majestic Territory again.

Unfortunately for him, Skullius vanished from range.

...!!!

The Hybrid Luman appeared a great distance away, his robes fluttering wildly.

He sighed.

It would have been a mark of remarkable incompetence if he was caught by the freakishly fast activation of the Ode's Territory for a third time.

The crimson-haired young man immediately spotted and charged after him.

Skullius grinned, and he zipped away, but the Ode was soon to catch up. He wasn't as fast as he was before.

His trajectory made the Ode cautious, though.

The Hybrid Luman was headed towards the remains of his Attegoth; where the Queen and Umbett were!

The two quickly noticed the approach of the two combatants, and the latter immediately cast a distortion that swerved around the Queen to finish off the Attegoth!

The Ode, assuming that Skullius had been hoping to save his masterpiece guffawed.

Yet Skullius... grinned.

He didn't hurry to the Graceful Monolith as everyone expected.

Instead, once he touched the surface of the lake, he zoomed his way to the right of the Attegoth, and watched as the distortion just now bashed into his creation and begin to drain both its brilliance and frame like a black hole!

Umbett turned her head to Skullius, as did the Queen, albeit with worry.

The old hag had a subtle 'fuck you' to the contours of her lips.

However, to her surprise, Skullius had the same look as he looked dead straight into her eyes!

In the miniscule morsels of time it took for the rest of the Attegoth to be destroyed, a great blanket of [Evil Darkness] and [Just Light] exploded from Skullius, towering up, up and further up!

The light coiled into the darkness and the darkness coiled into the light rapidly, with Skullius, the source of the vicious tide locking his fingers in a complex manner, which prompted the mesh of elements to instantly take on a horrific shape that hadn't been seen in over 4,000 years!

Skullius watched as the look in Umbett's face changed. Only she could have felt more rattled than everyone else as the shape above cast a shadow so wide and so dark that the night might have been convinced that it had become the day.

The Ode froze, then desperately called the name of his Territory!

The Queen turned pale... and opened her own!

Amidst the furious action, only Skullius looked fit for the darkness that everything was happening in, and as he donned a devilish look on his face, the guidance field rewarding his great achievement, forged above Opungale.

[Congratulations, you have successfully completed the Second Trial!]

Chapter 1008: RETAINER (1)

[Congratulations, you have successfully completed the Second Trial!]

[You have passed a large milestone, transitioning from the Advancement Stage and into the...]

Skullius couldn't have bothered with the notifications right now.

With the Bashful Abomination held between his teeth so that he could properly perform hand gestures, his focus was drowned in what he was executing, as well as the events that were about to happen. The prospect of these two things colliding thrilled him so much that...

[You are HYPED!]

[You are HYPED!]

[You are HYPED!]

A thrilling surge coming from the cells of his Hybrid Luman flesh caused Skullius to perceive and process everything around him at fifteen times the norm; a result of the activation of [Beyond The Hype], a skill that activated in circumstances such as these!

This benefit was much needed by the Hybrid Luman, after all, even without paying keen attention, he managed to perceive the bursting of Nitros from the Queen and the Ode. Unlike before, Skullius sensed the expulsion of Old Folks' Campfire in slow motion.

It was serene and tranquil, surprisingly, but he couldn't say the same about Queen Embrell's Territory. It seemed aggressive and rugged, which wasn't a sign of its inferiority, but the Queen's tension.

Skullius was amused.

There was something to be said about what would happen when two different Territories met and clashed against each other.

Unfortunately, the answer as to what would happen... would not be revealed in this instance.

The dark shadow above the lake wasn't just for show.

Skullius had kept the Bashful Abomination on him so that he could keep the affix that gave his affinity with [Evil Darkness] an A rank, active. Darkness of at least that quality was what was required for this feat, after all.

Said feat, which had been the requirement for Skullius' Second Trial, was of course, creating a PHANTASMIC RETAINER!

The towering figure above Skullius, which had spooked even Umbett as it solidified and took shape, was extremely daunting.

It had a peculiar presence that was neither overbearing or dismissible. If anything, it inspired a sense of desolation and loneliness. Its appearance on the other hand, was what made everything chaotic.

The entity was so tall that the last bits of it sank into the clouds overhead, and its width at its base – where it was broadest – could engulf a regular-sized Aurora. Said base was actually a set of massive, crossed human-like legs more tenebrous than the night.

Above them, was a thin, even torso from which thousands of pairs of long, spooky human arms ranging from small to enormous protruded without rhyme or rhythm. Their hands expressed the same gesture, strangely enough, all the way up to the clouds where the rest of the figure sank.

Intense streams of golden white lights protruded from several points on the dark figure, notably the joints between the torso and the arms, which revealed two things: the fact that the dark hue on this entity was more like a rugged, chitinous armor, and that the actual being beneath this, was made of light.

Facing an enemy so huge that its face couldn't be seen without parting the clouds was horrific in its own right, but what was even more frightening, was when said enemy, whom everyone but Skullius only saw in detail for a second, suddenly caused total darkness to bury the entire continent.

The darkness was like a wave.

Well, it was better than that. Its potency was worse than that of a tide.

The Ode and the Queen felt this best.

The Nitros from their Territories being expelled, was saturated in darkness. Even when they had almost completed creating their Territories, they found it hard to contain all the darkness within them, and as such, the shapes of their magical demesnes burst after a struggle that only lasted less than half an instant!

The range of the gloom was so overwhelming that after devouring all of the mostly uninhabited Opungale, it bled into the sea as well, wantonly relieving every living thing of its ability to appreciate all of creation.

...

The sensation was like no other.

Once engulfed within the tenebrosity, one would feel like they were buried in wet cement.

Furthermore, all the senses were shut down.

Sight. Hearing. Smell. Taste. Speech.

To the weaker folk caught in this, it was easy to begin to doubt whether or not they even existed.

There was no evidence for it.

Thoughts tended to turn murky when there was no information to draw.

And here, there was only... black.

Skullius alone was free.

The Insurgent Magnus alone could feel that he was alive.

No. Better than that, he felt that his existence was justified all the more, venerated by the darkness.

Everyone else... was beneath him, even the old hag he had been wary of before.

She too was drowned.

Skullius had rushed towards her location just now, because he wanted to ensure that she wouldn't be able to escape. The darkness vomited by the thing above him travelled, after all, and there was no telling what Umbett might have done if he hadn't been close.

That said, all this didn't seem enough to hold her for too long. Thus...

"Let's complete this..." Skullius said, and the guidance field acted upon his wish.

[You are imbibing TWO Seeds of the Fruit of World Myths into the PHANTASMIC RETAINER, Noboboyhama, Spirit of Blind Drowning]

[Number 6, 'Melding Stitches' has been imbibed]

[Number 8, 'Delight's Pursuit' has been imbibed]

Right then, only Skullius could hear the PHANTASMIC RETAINER, Spirit of Blind Drowning, trembling as two Seeds of his Fruit of World Myths sank within it and were immediately applied to its already monstrous abilities!

The result was mind-boggling.

Something peered through the absolute darkness from above.

It was small, yet its intensity was so unusual that it stuck out so obviously amid the depth of black.

It was shaped like a minimalistic eye, proudly tinged with the same golden white of [Just Light].

Every living that had been drenched in the maddening darkness had no choice but to snap into the direction of light desperately.

It was the only thing that could convince them that Aigas was a thing. That their lives were real. That they were still alive.

...And that, was the trap.

The perfect trap.

Once one saw that bright eye, they would be shown what they wanted to see and be suffocated in a false delight, so much so, that their current lives were all but lost...if the Hybrid Luman wished it.

But that wasn't all.

Skullius was not satisfied with just this.

He might have been influenced by Fulgardt's will, but he was also curious about these powers that he was yet to know fully.

Just how absurd could they be?

His insidious desires grew all the more as he toyed with everything that was drowned in his darkness, and as a result...

[You have inherited the <WILL OF THE WISH-GIVER>]

Chapter 1009: RETAINER (2)

While the Preeminent Attegoth had been destroyed along with all Skullius' skills the Hybrid Luman retained the ability to control [Evil Darkness] and [Just Light] still.

Skullius did not need skills to manipulate these two elements. Back in the Labyrinth of the Yoke, he had been able to control [Evil Darkness] and [Just Light] before even receiving his first skill related to the elements, before even receiving the legacy.

The reason was, of course, his affinities.

As long as Skullius had a good affinity, he was able to freely control the elements well enough. Skills for manipulating these only added a much-needed finesse and simplified the process. Where additional crutches were truly needed, was for the mass production of elements.

Since [Greatest Antiphon of Malignance] was out for the count, Skullius had used the essence that made up the Attegoth – what was left of it before its destruction – to fuel the proportions he needed to create the PHANTASMIC RETAINER. His Graceful Monolith was made of a large amount of condensed [Just Light] after all, hence its name, the Precept of Light.

A PHANTASMIC RETAINER could only be made using affinities for darkness and light that were of the A rank and higher, with precise proportions, as Skullius had read from the tablets back in the Temple of Unlusted Tears.

Of course, the current him already had greater knowledge of this than his former self.

The RETAINERS – three in all – were like vessels that empowered his abilities better than his flesh could, no matter how strong he got, and were the best at using the Seeds of the Fruit of World Myths.

Skullius had been awarded with three more Seeds – much like – after his interaction with Luserus.

Noboboyhama, however, was a vessel only capable of holding two Seeds at a time, but that turned out to be more than enough.

'This should do,' Skullius thought, and he loosened his fingers from their gesture.

The darkness that had swallowed the world receded back into the bold figure above him, revealing once again the humble night which had suffered a ton of horrors in a short span of time.

The spectacular characteristic of Noboboyhama had only lasted a minute, but so much had changed and so many had been affected.

So much had changed.

The status core had completely shifted.

Skullius sighed.

The Bashful Abomination vanished from the grip of his teeth, and he slotted his hands into the darkness cast on his entire torso to his knees by his robe. Leisurely, he walked over to where the Preeminent Attegoth had been protruding from the lake, and let out another sigh.

"It is a bit inconvenient for my Attegoth to remain exposed every time. But well, it has to be planted somewhere rich each time so that it blooms well," he said.

Indeed. The Attegoth may have been destroyed, but it was not lost. Skullius only needed to plant its seed again, and wait for it to sprout back up.

It would have been convenient for him to plant it somewhere safe, like in Fortune, the magical world in his Elimparidis Stone Staff, but there was a caveat. If he set up the Graceful Monolith there, while it would be safe, he wouldn't be able to use its expansive sensory range on the battlefield to constantly keep track of everything.

All the Attegoth would be able to see, would be the things it was surrounded by, after all.

In any case, Skullius only needed to work towards giving the Attegoth better chances at defending itself. This had failed in the last battle because he was expending a massive amount of mana against the Ode, and for the Attegoth to protect itself in the same way, it too would have to expend just as much mana.

That was not efficient.

"I should work towards getting a purple core myself. And I should probably merge all my [Evil Darkness] skills when I recover the Attegoth. That should solve some of my shortcomings..."

Hmmm. The thought of that made Skullius smile.

"Will you leave us like this forever, young man?"

Skullius had been so absorbed in his review of the Graceful Monolith's performance that he had nearly brushed off the results of his RETAINER's effort.

He turned to Umbett.

"Ah, I was sure you got mind-addled too. Though, I suppose you really are a cut above the rest," Skullius said while flashing the woman a mocking grin.

Umbett still stood above the water.

She didn't look like she had received any damage, but well, injuring and maiming wasn't the point.

Umbett's arms were folded before her chest. It wasn't her wish to adopt such nonchalance, however. She was forced to.

If one looked closely, they could see thick stitches digging into her arms and then into the skin of her chest. The stitches transcended the material of what she wore, and eerily, her hands and chest were melded together, the skin of both becoming one.

The color of the stitches was so dark that it might have been a concept instead of actual material, and quite clearly, it was the reason behind this odd phenomenon. It looked permanent. The fact that Umbett hadn't broken free suggested it.

Beyond that, however, Umbett's feet were also stitched onto the water, and there was no longer a distinction between her soles and toes, and the surface of the lake.

Freakiest of all, was how taut stitches pulled on the whole outline of the old hag, stretching her skin and digging into the obscure surroundings; into space itself.

"I assume you are waiting to see what I will do before trying to use your Creeds to break free?" Skullius said to the old woman.

Her face turned ugly with a slight frown.

"Indeed. Will you kill the Ode?" she asked.

Skullius laughed.

"You'd be in trouble if that were to happen, wouldn't you?" he said, and he turned his head towards the Ode.

Like Umbett, the poor young prince had his hands bound, as well as his whole outline. However, his mouth, legs and ears were also melded together by stitches. Worse yet, his eyes were glazed, a faint golden light visible on them. His pupils could be seen staring up, his eyeballs stitched in a way that kept them rolled in a direction that supported this.

He wasn't the only one to be in this rough predicament.

Every other Maqian who was still alive was in the same boat.

This was the effect of the Number 8 Seed, Delight's Pursuit.

Those who stared into the glowing eye, the only source of light in the darkness, had had their minds enticed into living in a fantasy where they enjoyed their deepest desires; where they weren't trapped in the eternal black, where they weren't questioning whether or not they exited or not. Of course, this ability only worked this well after the victims were left desperate and vulnerable.

This was achieved using the Spirit of Blind Drowning's wide field of dulling darkness.

The same could be said about the Melding Stitch. It was only possible to bind all these targets after the thick domain of [Evil Darkness] was erected for a long enough time.

Umbett seemed to have survived the former of the two Seed effects because she hadn't looked into the light. That took some nonsensical degrees of mental resilience.

With that in mind, Skullius scoffed at the Ode's image. To think he had actually been prepared for a reality where the Ode resisted like Umbett.

"I've decided against killing him," Skullius answered the hag's inquiry. "Our agreed upon conditions were simply 'if I win' and in this case... it's rather obvious who beat the other. Besides that, I think it's a waste to kill a Spirit Warden. Even I don't know much about them. While we are on our way back to Maqi, I'd like to do a few experiments."

Umbett gave Skullius a stern glare.

"So, you truly wish to go to Maqi as part of your reward, and with the Ode in such a state?" she asked. "Are you mental?"

Skullius waved the old woman off.

"Yes, and yes. "Though, I do think it's fair that since I'm letting the Ode alive, the rest of your combatants should be put to death. Preferably by those they assaulted. That would do wouldn't it, my dear Queen?" the Hybrid Luman said as he turned to Embrell who stood free from any binding or mental affliction.

She was simply stunned and quite frankly, rattled. The Spirit of Blind Drowning still stood over her head, after all.

To Skullius' question, she gave a simple nod.

Chapter 1010: The Next Calamity?

Embrell was still recovering from what had just happened. Her response to the tense situation from a minute ago had not gone the way she thought it would. She had begun to feel uneasy when Skullius' monument was destroyed and when the Ode hurried to erect his Territory, she followed suit in order to keep Skullius alive.

That was the least she could do for someone who was fighting on the Sif's behalf, after all.

Her surprise at the fact that he didn't help at all, though, blew her mind.

Never had she ever imagined that there was someone who could destroy a Territory by oversaturating it with an absurd volume of, well, anything. The fact that Skullius did this to not only her, but the Ode too was unbelievable.

What followed next was even more mind-boggling. The darkness, that light...

Strangely, Embrell was not afflicted by the long-term effects, like the Ode and the old hag.

Even the millions upon millions of summoned creatures from before were also lost in desire and stitched to the fabric of space.

This was all because of the behemoth sitting in the air, its face still unseen because of its extraordinary height. It appeared Skullius was going to keep it around for a little while longer, and that, sadly, prolonged Embrell's unease.

Then again, looking at the Hybrid Luman now as he boldly gave her the right to kill all the Maqians left, she couldn't help but remember the declaration that Skullius had made:

'I alone will end the war.'

And he had done so as he promised.

The Queen walked closer towards Skullius as he nodded back, acknowledging his gift. He looked back to Umbett.

"Curious enough. It seems your allies, those Emeradis Summoners have fled. Well, those that aren't dead at least. I can't sense them among the remainder of your force that I have captured. Was that part of the plan?" Skullius asked.

Umbett didn't answer. A cold look remained in her eyes as she glared at Skullius.

The Hybrid Luman scoffed.

"Of course. The old tend to be tight-lipped. Maqi hasn't lost its honor, I see."

Skullius assumed that there was a very loose agreement between the Maqians and the Summoners from Emeradis. Neither really needed the other's help, but it seemed there was common interest in Opungale. The Maqians wanted to take the land and Emeradis wanted the mana from the citizens.

It was unknown what the mana was needed for, but if Skullius had to guess, the purpose was likely related to how the Sif had different ways of using their mana, just as every nation had biases, traditions and techniques native to them.

Well, as expected of the nation that bore the first Mage.

Umbett seemed rattled by something Skullius said. She couldn't show it because her body couldn't move an inch despite the light rippling waves of the water which were bonded to her feet, but her eyes said a lot, and then eventually, her voice came in an ominous tone.

"Lost honor? What exactly do you know of Maqi? You make assumptions and declare things that only one born in our land should know. Who are you?" she said.

Skullius stared at her for a long time.

Queen Embrell frowned as she alternated her gaze between the two.

What did this old woman mean? Surely...Skullius couldn't be a Maqian, right? Darwel – besides the other stuff she said, which Embrell didn't believe – had said that he was from Pelian. Even the Ode had been convinced of it, even though his assumption was based on Skullius wielding swords.

"My name is Festos. Festos Dawn. Ah, I haven't used my last name in a while. Curious where that name came from, hmm. I am not Maqian, but I am someone who knows a lot about that nation," Skullius said.

Umbett frowned a little more.

"Is that right?" she said with a testy tone. "I knew from the moment I saw that glowing abomination, that something was wrong. And now, THAT."

The old woman's eyes rose towards the sky.

"I only read of it from ancient texts, but to think I would get to see it. A mantle belonging to the scourge of our land. And to think that scourge actually crafted his legacy for someone else... We scoured for any remnants of him after that time and were convinced there were none. Yet here it is."

The Queen was startled.

Skullius narrowed his eyes.

"Of all the inheritances from those times... Boy, do you intend to become the next calamity after all these millennia?!" Umbett hissed.

Skullius remained silent while Embrell gulped. Her eyes shook.

Scourge of Maqi?

No...

Skullius noticed her growing trepidation.

The Queen was likely to have already put the pieces together.

Oh well. It wasn't like this needed to continue being a secret anyway.

"Whether I become a bane for all existence depends on how my round trip around the world goes, I suppose. My first trip will of course be, somewhere that could easily be interpreted as my home, and then I have an old friend to visit. After that, I might have to kill something I created," he said while adorning a thoughtful smile. "So, as you can see, its not entirely up to me what I become."

Right as Umbett gave an ugly frown, a brisk, dark string knitted her lips together and soon, she had no mouth to use for speech.

"Stay still for now, will you? You can't break free of this as easily without both your voice and your limbs. This is a unique thread, you know. It exists outside the norm you're used to," he said and began walking away.

Embrell traced his figure with her beautiful eyes and then followed behind him.

The two walked in silence.

The tranquility that came after the harsh events just now felt misplaced.

The sky was marred by trails of blue and green difficult to identify as swarms of living creatures. It almost looked like a mural of gradient, simple concept art that gave the night a dash a flair, especially after the short-lived invasion.

One would have thought this was a much-needed sight for relief, but those who remained on Opungale didn't need it.

The enemies were subdued, incapable of appreciating it.

The victims were seedified, incapable of perceiving it.

And speaking of the seedification, Skullius saw, through the ever-loyal and jubilant nature which whispered scores of victorious melodies and wordless gratitude in his ears, the figure of the Deathly Ruse. It stood tall and proud, having lived through the assault by the enemies overheard.

It also seemed to have sucked in all the seeds – all of the citizens of Opungale – successfully.

It was fortunate that that was the case, but it came at a price.